



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

ON THE NOMENCLATURE OF CITIES AND TOWNS IN THE UNITED STATES.

BY

DAVID DUDLEY FIELD.

We passed, last summer, through a season of College Commencements. Each had its score of orators, all intent on finding subjects interesting to their hearers, but it is not probable that one of them thought of stooping to a subject so trivial in their eyes as the names of places around them. And yet these were not really trivial matters. We have much to say of the fitness of names to the things in general; why not, then, the fitness of names to the things named? For my part, thinking the subject one of consequence, of much consequence indeed, I have taken it for this lecture.

Geographical nomenclature is within the scope of this Society. To describe the surface of the earth in all its divisions, call them by their names and penetrate into their recesses, are objects which you propose to yourselves. The fitness of these names to the places they purport to represent must therefore be pertinent to your studies.

A great wrong was done to Columbus in giving to the New World which he discovered a name not his, but that of another Italian, his follower. In a vain endeavor to right this wrong the two names have become strangely interchanged and misapplied. We, of this country, are embarrassed by the confusion which follows their use in two different senses. We call our country America, and ourselves Americans, but we sing "Hail Columbia" as our national song, while

British Columbia flanks us on the northwest and the United States of Colombia face us from the Isthmus of Darien. We visit Niagara and cross from the American to the Canadian side of the great cataract. If we pass beyond the equator, we find a group of republics, all calling themselves American. An enterprising countryman proposes to build a railway from the northmost to the southmost countries of this hemisphere, and to call it the Three Americas Railway. I make my boast that I am an American, as the Roman boasted that he was a Roman citizen, when the words were potent from one end of the earth to the other, but the Brazilians and the Peruvians claim also to be Americans, and the claim cannot be denied. Our fair countrywomen, whose bright faces are seen so often in the streets of Paris and among the monuments of Rome, never think of calling themselves by any other name than American, forgetting that the same belongs also to the matrons of Venezuela and the daughters of Chili. Whether there be now any remedy for these inconveniences I will not undertake to say, but I wish that this Society, which has earned its title to the highest respect among geographers everywhere, would study the subject and give us the fruit of its studies. The moderns, unlike the ancients, seem to have a passion for misnomer. Why else should the great island of the Eastern sea, greatest of all islands, be called New Guinea instead of Papua, or that English island, which pushes its green shores far down towards the Antarctic, be baptized New Zealand instead of Maoria, or worse still, the oldest province of Australia burden itself with the unspeakable name of New South Wales, which by natural sequence would make its people New-South-Walers!

Our happiness depends a great deal upon the places in which we live, and the pleasure or pain they give is affected by the names we know them by. We are told that Hood went to a school kept by two maiden sisters named *Hogs-flesh*. They had a brother who would be addressed only as Mr. H. He was right. Yet one would as soon receive a letter addressed to him as *Hogs-flesh*, as one addressed to him in *Hogspen*. But even this is not the worst of all possible names for there is a town in Arizona named *Tombstone*. Worse still are such names as these, which I take from a railway list of towns in the United States: You Bet, Pop Corn, Wild Cat, Cub Run, Cut Shin, Bake Oven, Big Coon, Burn Corn, Rawhide, Toad Vine, Black Jack, Skunk Lake, Buzzard Roost, Cat Creek, Dirt Town, Doctor Town, Jug Tavern, Sawdust, Big Fort, Fish Hook, Big John, Cowskin, Cut Off, and so on, a disgusting array of names, which, if we did not know better, we should think could come only from a semi-barbarous people.

Milton, describing the fabric raised by the fallen angels, exclaimed that :

“ Not Babylon,
Nor Great Alcairo, such magnificence
Equall'd in all their glories, to enshrine
Belus or Serapis their gods, or seat
Their Kings, when Egypt with Assyria strove
In wealth and luxury.”

What would he have said had he been told that, on the other side of the sea, the name of the Assyrian capital would one day be assumed by a straggling Long Island village, or that a new settlement on a low tongue of mud thrust out between the Ohio and the Mississippi would be named after the seat of Egyptian Kings? And, as if to

lose nothing grandiloquent from the land of Egypt, a Memphis has been established three hundred miles below. Who, looking upon it, would ever ask another looker-on if it did not remind him of "Busiris and his Memphian chivalry."

Let us come nearer home, and look at the map of New York. On the shore of a lake famed for its beauty, the State had once an agricultural school and has now an asylum. The place enchants you. You ask its name? Ovid. You are disenchanted. At the head of another lake lies a pretty village, the seat of a university. Nothing can exceed the beauty of the landscape; stretching to the north till the glance of the lake meets the blue of the sky on the far-off horizon, and on either side the land binding the the water with a rim of emerald; hill and meadow, cape and bay blending in one picture never to be forgotten. By what freak of idiocy was there misplaced upon this inland settlement, hundreds of miles from the sea, a name which for forty centuries had been associated in the minds of men with the immortal song of Homer, the island-kingdom of Ulysses, and the fortunes of Penelope and Telemachus! We may admire, as indeed we must, the beauty of the landscape; we may honor, as we surely will, the university whose doors are open for man and woman alike, but the misnomer will intrude into our thoughts, do what we will. The teachers and scholars of this century, for the faults of the last, are obliged to stamp upon the letters they write, the reports they make, the books they publish—ITHACA!

The traveler on his way from New York to Niagara passes three greatly prospering but grievously misnamed cities, Troy, Utica and Syracuse. There were Indian names enough

at hand, sprung from the soil, spoken for ages by the aboriginal inhabitants, but they were cast aside for an alien nomenclature, which is as much out of place here as the sculptures of the Parthenon are out of place in a London museum. Who has not been moved by the pathos of Red Jacket exclaiming, that the tears fell from his eyes "as the drops of rain fall from the tops of the trees of Oneida." Substitute Utica for Oneida in this passage and see how it loses its poetic charm. It is poor compensation that Oneida and Onondaga have been taken for the names of counties instead of the fair cities to which they of right belong. For the former they are spoken and written as occasion serves, few times a day perhaps; for the latter they would be spoken and written every minute of the waking hours.

Central New York was a military tract, that is, a tract set apart for bounties to soldiers, and the tradition is that a pedantic surveyor-general of the last century took ancient names, at random, out of a classical dictionary to scatter broadcast over this new land. That may not be surprising, but it is surprising that they are retained by the citizens of this generation, by men of letters and taste, scholars and enthusiasts, and so much the more as this central region has universities, colleges and academies not a few, some of which might perhaps withdraw their attention, for a while, from more ambitious tasks to the humbler one of plucking these thorns and thistles from their own soil.

Let us look at the names, or some of them, in a group: Aurelius, Athens, Arcadia, Attica, Brutus, Babylon, Cairo, Carthage, Corinth, Cato, Cicero, Camillus, Diana, Fabius, Greece, Hannibal, Homer, Ithaca, Ilion, Italy, Jerusalem, Lysander, Minerva, Milo, Marcellus, Marathon, Manlius,

Ovid, Pompey, Pharsalia, Palmyra, Romulus, Rome, Scipio, Solon, Sparta, Syracuse, Scio, Smyrna, Sempronius, Tully, Tyre, Troy, Utica, Ulysses, Virgil. So much for the old surveyor-general and his old names. See what his modern imitators have added : Amsterdam, Berlin, Bombay, Cuba, Chili, Denmark, Dresden, Dryden, Dublin, Edinburgh, Florence, Genoa, Geneva, Java, Jamaica, Junius, Lima, Lodi, Madeira, Malta, Messina, Milan, Naples, Norway, Ossian, Palermo, Parma, Paris, Potsdam, Riga, Rotterdam, Russia, Salamanca, Stockholm, Sweden, Turin, Verona, Vienna, Volney, Warsaw, Wilna. But I am weary of the recital.

It would not be difficult to find an agreeable name for every place in the country. Though the number of post-offices amounts already to fifty thousand and the land is but half-filled, good names may be found for all. I would by no means follow the example of a late assistant post-master-general, who, it is said, bestowed his name, and it was not a very musical one at best, on hundreds of our post-offices. There is, to begin with, the large supply of Indian names. These should be restored, as many of them as possible, not merely because they are significant and musical, but because they would stand as memorials of the Indian races, so many of which have perished, while the rest are perishing day by day. The same famous Indian orator whose name I have just mentioned, at a Council held in Hartford, poured out his soul in this lament over the fortunes of his people :

“ We stand, a small island in the bosom of the great waters. We are encircled—we are encompassed. The evil spirit rides upon the blast, and the waters are disturbed. They rise ; they press upon us ; and the waves once settled over us we disappear forever. Who, then, lives to mourn us ? None..

What marks our extermination? Nothing. We are mingled with the common elements."

Is it not possible even now to restore, where they are all but lost, and to retain, where they yet remain, the names which this perishing people gave to their homes and hunting-grounds, their rivers and hills? What memorial more fit, or more enduring, outlasting brass or granite, than the words of their plaintive tongue, lingering forever upon the hill-tops, the valleys and the streams which they loved so well?

How musical most of their names were we know from those we have retained, as: Alabama, Algoma, Atamaha, Arizona, Cayuga, Dakota, Erie, Genesee, Huron, Horicon, Iowa, Idaho, Kanawha, Mississippi, Monongahela, Minnesota, Michigan, Milwaukee, Nebraska, Ontario, Pensacola, Santee, Saratoga, Saranac, Sonora, Susquehanna, Tacoma, Tennessee, Tuscarora, Wisconsin, Wyoming. The old names could be found in old histories, old geographies, old maps, town records, and even in novels like Cooper's. There is a curious memoir on names, read before our Historical Society in 1816, by Egbert Benson, which might be consulted with advantage. Village improvement societies are just the agencies for such work. Then a local object, mountain, valley, or river might suggest a name, as Capetown, Longmeadow, Cherry Valley. So might the name of a founder or prominent inhabitant be taken with an English termination, as Jamestown, Williamstown, Charlestown. But by all means avoid terminations that do not belong to our language. Banish "*ville*" altogether. It is not English, but French, and only French. It does not fit well with our names. Indeed, it disfigures whatever it touches,

making the good bad, and the bad worse. To use it is *vili-fication*. Whoever puts “ville” to a name in this country literally vilifies it. It is not merely wrong in itself, however used, but it is used in a wrong sense. It signifies city. We apply it mostly to insignificant villages. Let us be at least manly enough to use our own language, and use it in its true signification. If speculators in town lots think that calling a place a city will help them sell their lots to the unwary, let them use the next less awful affix, and do as has been done in respect of *Jersey City*, *Long Island City*, *Michigan City*—dreadful alternatives—or if a tavern keeper, in the midst of half-a-dozen houses, wishes to magnify his settlement by adding pretentious syllables to its name, let him do it outright, and call it Smith-village, instead of Smithville. That the distasteful affix of “*vile*,” should be taken so often is a mortifying proof of bad taste, or poverty of invention, or of stolid indifference. The passion for it is almost a disease, and the instances of its disfigurement may be counted by thousands upon thousands. What could be more dreadful than McGrawville? I think I would go out of my way to avoid a place lying under the cloud of such a name. Our language is richer than the French, and it has words in plenty capable of being annexed as terminations to the names of persons or things. Thus: town, borough, field, ford, hill, vale, meadow, plain, can be made use of, some of them in two forms, as town or ton (Charlestown or Charleston), borough or burg (Goldsborough or Ogdensburg). Then we have the names of our own famous men which might be taken without an affix, as they have in so many instances been taken; for example, Washington, Jackson, Lincoln.

If the people of a neighborhood are able to find no name in an Indian dialect, if none is suggested by a local object, or a person of local prominence, they have at least the wide domain of invention. They can invent at will, and give names, which, however unmeaning, are at least musical. Elberon, at Long Branch, is an instance of happy invention working upon a local name. The owner of the site was Mr. L. B. Brown, out of which an inventive genius made Elberon, the sonorous name it now bears. Saltaire, in England, is an instance of two words well blended, Salt after Sir Titus Salt and Aire, the name of a river. What we want is a name pleasant to hear. Generally, as we have said, we can find one that has a meaning and sounds well, but when that is impossible we can invent one which, if it has no meaning, has at least an agreeable sound. Among natural objects, the trees alone would furnish a considerable supply, as, for example, the Linden, out of which could be made Overlinden, Underlinden, Bylinden, Lindenfield, Lindenfeld, Lindenhill, Lindengrove, Lindenburg, Lindensbank, Lindenside. Or an Indian name could be varied by different terminations, as from Oneida Oneidaland and so on. Out of Genesee, Geneseo was made. But in the dearth of all else, invent a name out and out.

Far better this than to borrow from the Old World. Better take any mellifluous syllables and put them together, than plant Sempronious or Pompey in the green valleys of America. From a few euphonious syllables an endless combination might be made, as any one will see who will take the trouble to try; for example, out of the five names, Altamaha, Cayuga, Monongahela, Susquehanna and Pensacola, which have between them twenty syllables, a combi-

nation in their possible varieties would furnish a store-house of names, as Altama, Altayuga, Altahela, Cayuhela, and so on.

Can the uncouth and uncongenial names which disfigure the map and set the face awry be gotten rid of? Why not? It needs but the will, the way is easy enough. In this State we have already a statute authorizing supervisors to divide a town and make new ones. Why not enlarge this statute so as to authorize the voters of a town to change its name with the consent of the county supervisors, taking care that the same name should not be bestowed on two different places. Other countries have made changes greater than any we may wish to make, and we surely can do as much as they. Names that were fastened for generations upon countries and cities have been changed. Byzantium gave way to Constantinople. Ancient and modern geography seem hardly to describe the same world. Compare a map of Europe in the time of Cæsar with another in the time of Napoleon. The maps of modern Europe are remade almost as often as every quarter of a century. Roll it up, it is of no more use, said Pitt, looking at a map of Italy after the battle of Marengo. Poland has been contracted, extended, blotted out, replaced, and blotted out again. The Batavian, Helvetic, and Cisalpine Republics were constructed, and in a few years fell to pieces. The kingdom of Westphalia appeared for a while in the list of continental states and vanished. Within the last forty years a new kingdom has arisen at the mouth of the Rhine, and retaken the old name of Belgium. The maps of Europe that we studied in boyhood made the Don its eastern boundary; under the influence of Russian geographers, the limit has been pushed

eastward to the Volga, and a vast tract separated from Asia. It is not fifty years since the continent which borders the Indian ocean eastward was known as New Holland. It is now Australia. Van Dieman's Land is Tasmania. A new nomenclature has been adopted for the islands of the great South sea; Otaheite and Owyhee have disappeared from the maps and Tahiti and Hawaii been written in their places. On our side of the ocean the peninsula next east of us was once Acadia. After it fell into the dominion of the English it was granted to Sir William Alexander, a Scotchman, and received a new baptism by the name of Nova Scotia. Upper Canada has become Ontario. Little York is now Toronto. We are about to change the territory of Washington into the State of Tacoma. Would that we could change New Mexico to Sonora, and New York to Manhattan.

What a name is New York for this queen of Western cities? Compare it with that which the Indian gave the island, barbarian as we call him, Manhattan or Manahatta. Who for its euphony and its significance would not wish the old name back again? Who, that cares for such things, does not grieve over the incongruity of the present name with the place? Old York and New York are as unlike as possible; one a small inland city, the other the seaport of half the world. As the voyager comes in from the sea, beholding the amplitude of the haven, the beauty of the islands, the richness and variety of the shores, the two rivers which clasp the island city with a rushing of great waters; the buildings, and the ships; the great bridge hanging in the air above them all, looking from below like an arch of gossamer, but above trodden on its solid floors

as if it were part of the enduring earth, and withal the abounding and exultant life that animates the scene, he is ready to exclaim : “ Oh thou that art situate at the entry of the sea, which art a merchant of the people unto many isles ; thy borders are in the midst of the seas ; thy builders have perfected thy beauty.” One thing only is wanting to the completeness of the picture ; the crown of a fitting name on the head of the imperial city. May we not hope that one day, when she joins hands with her sister city, as she surely will, she will retake the old and true name of the ever bright island of Manhattan.

It is not extravagant to say, that there is not another country on the face of the earth disfigured by so many inappropriate names as our own. England has English words of Saxon and Norman origin. Holland has those which are wholly Dutch. France has her own, handed down from the Franks. In Italy and Spain the names are partly Roman and partly the gifts of invaders. Germany and Switzerland have names which are histories. Denmark and Sweden owe theirs—soft and musical they are—to the Goths and Vandals. And Russia, Poland and Bohemia, harsh as many of them appear to us, have at least those which are significant to the Slavonic races. But here what an admixture of Greek and Roman, English, French, Italian, Slavonic and Gothic—a piebald map—a confused jumble of old and new ; as if there were nothing original, nothing appropriate to the soil, nothing that distinguished the mass of human beings who have taken possession of these shores.

American literature, we do not for a moment doubt, has a future equal to the past of any country or age. Why should it not ? We are the heirs of all the ages,

we have not degenerated in mind or body from the standard of our progenitors, and we have been placed by Providence in as fair a domain as was ever vouchsafed to the children of men, in the Old World or the New. Behold, what a domain it is; scenery in innumerable forms of land and water, landscapes less finished but more varied than those of England, great lakes, inland seas as they are, storm-vexed Mediterraneans of the West, rivers rivaling the Nile, wide prairies swelling with harvests, or smiling with wild flowers as they lie waiting to be taken for the use of man, snowy ridges of the central mountains, Alps added to Alps, canyons dark and deep, through whose long abysses great rivers rush foaming to the sea, boundless forests, dim and lonely, save as they are trodden by wild beasts or wild men with cautious footsteps, trees of the forest older and taller than the cedars of Lebanon, the Yosemite and the Niagara, and over all a pure elastic atmosphere quickening the senses, widening the horizon, and lighting up the firmament with the flames of sunset or heightening the brightness of the Autumn woods.

Who, not wholly insensible to nature, can stand on a New England hill in the glow of an October noon, the blood bounding through his veins with the exhilarating air, while the clouds hang lazily along the horizon or move slowly across the sky, escorted by shadows from hill to valley and valley to hill, and the trees on the hillsides and the plains vie with one another in their robes of scarlet and green and gold, or perchance in the evening twilight, when the witchery of nature is greatest, in the full flush of the gloaming, while the colors of the rainbow suffuse the west and the air is soft and still—who can stand thus, sur-

rounded by autumnal glory, without feeling as much assured, as if a prophet foretold, that the highest poetry would yet vie with the highest art to portray this resplendent earth and sky. And what may happen here may happen elsewhere, until every bright or wild scene shall have its chronicle and song, and the whole land be as rich in its literature as in its cities and harvests, from the Peak of Katahdin to the fountains of Sonora.

Turn, then, from the place to the people. If we are not permitted to praise ourselves, we may nevertheless boast of our fathers and their deeds. Look into their annals from the earliest settlements to the times nearest our own, to find history surpass romance. Their first emigration hither was, not for gain nor for conquest, but for a sentiment, and sentiment has carried the country through all the great crises of its history. For a sentiment our fathers defied the arms of England and won their independence, for a sentiment they fought England again in 1812, and for a sentiment our last great war was fought, that Titanic struggle that shook the world. The first comers, pilgrims and colonists, passed through perils of the sea to meet perils of the wilderness, but they held their own, as an advance guard holds its ground until they who are to follow come on, and so our forefathers held their ground until others came, and the little band, swelling with time, became a host and moved on from valley to valley and river to river, until at last they and their sons, and their sons' sons, subdued the land, built goodly homes, established commonwealths, and scattered their enemies from the rivers of Florida to the plains of Abraham. They were not all from the same stock. The predominant element was cer-

tainly English as the English were in the seventeenth century ; but there was also an admixture of Celtic, Teutonic and Frank. Though they had the common purpose of making a permanent establishment in the New World, there were strong contrasts of manners between the Puritans of New England, the Dutch Burghers of New York, the Quakers of Pennsylvania, the Lutherans of Delaware, the Catholics of Maryland, the cavaliers of Virginia, and the Huguenots of South Carolina. The varied lives and the brave deeds of these worthies so contrasted in manners, but so drawn together by the magnetic force of common dangers and common purposes, form the richest of materials for song and story. The wild tales of those earlier times were carried from fireside to fireside, and preserved in many a legend. When the Colonies became States and the States became a nation, though there followed a blending of manners, the same spirit remained, the same strength of arm and the same power of will. These elements and these circumstances have developed traits of character which must affect the literature, as they affect the life of a people, fertility of invention, love of adventure, daring that does not hesitate and hardihood that never gives up, joined to a peculiar humor and an ever active imagination.

Behold now thirty-eight commonwealths resting in peace after the storms of war, peopling the land acre by acre with each recurring day, building cities and pouring into the lap of plenty harvests such as were never before gathered by the hands of men. These influences, the stories of the past and the promises of the future, in the scenes we have described, will serve to create and fashion a literature of the land. We have already given an earnest of what we

can do. Irving, Cooper, Bancroft, Motley, Prescott, Longfellow, Bryant, Whittier, Emerson, Hawthorne, Lowell, Holmes, are harbingers of a greater day to come. Let us hope that, in the cultivation of a taste for letters and the arts, a subject so little considered as that we have been discussing may not be lost sight of, but that our own beloved land, the land of so many memories and so many hopes, may not only bind our hearts to her by the love of country and the love of home, but make the homes all the sweeter for the association of pleasant names with pleasant places.